

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
SPTA-02 /070 W
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R 260004Z JUL 78
FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8109

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, PINS, PN
SUBJECT: UNIVERSITY RE-OPENS

REF: PANAMA 4896

SUMMARY: THE UNIVERSITY OF PANAMA RE-OPENED JULY 20, WITHOUT INCIDENT, AFTER HAVING BEEN CLOSED BECAUSE OF STUDENT VIOLENCE SINCE JUNE 14. UNDER NEW GROUND RULES INTENDED TO AVOID FUTURE OUTBREAKS OF VIOLENCE, STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS AND ACTIVITIES WILL BE RESTRICTED. THE GOVERNMENT-SANCTIONED STUDENT ORGANIZATION (FEP) REPORTEDLY WILL BE ALLOWED TO OPERATE OPENLY, BUT ONLY "SUB ROSA" ACTIVITIES BY ITS FAR-LEFT RIVALS WILL BE TOLERATED. WE EXPECT THE ANTI-TORRIJOS STUDENTS TO BE GIVEN A GOOD BIT OF FREEDOM -- ENOUGH TO KEEP THEM FROM BECOMING DESPERATE BUT NOT ENOUGH TO ALLOW THEM TO BECOME DOMINANT IN THE UNIVERSITY. END SUMMARY.

1. ON JULY 20, THE UNIVERSITY OF PANAMA (UP) RE-OPENED, WITHOUT INCIDENT. IT HAD BEEN CLOSED SINCE JUNE 14 WHEN AN OUTBREAK OF VIOLENCE AMONG RIVAL STUDENT GROUPS RESULTED IN TWO DEATHS. SINCE THE INCIDENT, UNIVERSITY AND GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES HAVE BEEN INVESTIGATING IT AND DEBATING WHAT TREATMENT SHOULD BE METED OUT TO THOSE

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INVOLVED IN ILLEGAL ACTIONS (SEE REFTEL). THE AUTHORITIES HAVE PLEDGED TO BRING THE GUILTY PARTIES TO JUSTICE, BUT THERE IS WIDESPREAD SKEPTICISM HERE THAT THE BROOM WILL SWEEP VERY CLEAN.

2. IN PREPARATION FOR THE RE-OPENING, THE DIRECTIVE AND ACADEMIC COUNCILS OF THE UNIVERSITY ISSUED NEW REGULATIONS

GOVERNING STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS AND ACTIVITIES. THESE REGULATIONS ARE INTENDED TO AVOID FUTURE INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE. THE MOST IMPORTANT CHANGE IS THAT THE ONLY STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS ALLOWED TO FUNCTION AT THE UP WILL BE THE OFFICIAL STUDENT ASSOCIATION IN EACH OF THE FACULTIES OR SCHOOLS MAKING UP THE UNIVERSITY. PROVISIONS ARE MADE FOR THESE ASSOCIATIONS TO UTILIZE UNIVERSITY FACILITIES FOR MEETINGS, FOR ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIVITIES, AND FOR THE PRINTING OF STUDENT PUBLICATIONS. PREVIOUSLY, NUMEROUS RIVAL STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS -- THE GOVERNMENT-SANCTIONED MARXIST FEP (FEDERATION OF PANAMANIAN STUDENTS) AND EXTREME LEFTIST GROUPS SUCH AS THE FER (FEDERATION OF REVOLUTIONARY STUDENTS), THE GUAYKUCHO, AND THE CAMILO TORRES CIRCLE, ETC. -- HAD OPERATED WITH APPARENT FREEDOM AND WERE ACTIVE BOTH IN NATIONAL AND UNIVERSITY POLITICS, INCLUDING COMPETING FOR CONTROL OF THE STUDENT ASSOCIATIONS OF THE VARIOUS FACULTIES AND SCHOOLS.

3. THE EMBASSY UNDERSTANDS, FROM TORRIJOS' ADVISER ROMULO ESCOBAR BETHANCOURT, THAT THE FEP, AS THE OFFICIAL STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE GROUP, WILL BE ALLOWED TO OPERATE FREELY, AND THAT "SUB ROSA" ACTIVITIES OF THE EXTREME LEFTISTS WILL BE TOLERATED. IT IS NOT YET CLEAR HOW THIS WILL WORK. PRESUMABLY THE EXTREMISTS WILL BE ABLE TO WIN THE ELECTIONS IN SOME FACULTIES AND THUS BECOME THE "OFFICIAL" REPRESENTATIVES THERE. OBVIOUSLY, A LOT DEPENDS ON IMPLEMENTATION.

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4. AMONG OTHER REGULATIONS ESTABLISHED BY THE UNIVERSITY ARE:

-- PUNISHMENT BY EXPULSION FOR ONE SEMESTER FOR INCITING VIOLENCE, PAINTING OR DAMAGING IN ANY WAY UNIVERSITY PROPERTY, OR THE INTERRUPTION OF STUDENTS AT ONE SCHOOL OR FACULTY BY STUDENTS OF ANOTHER IN ORDER TO CAUSE TENSION OR TO DISRUPT STUDIES.

-- PUNISHMENT BY EXPULSION FOR POSSESSING OR CARRYING FIREARMS OR ANY OTHER KIND OF WEAPON ON THE CAMPUS.

-- THE PERIODIC INSPECTION OF STUDENT ASSOCIATION OFFICES BY THE DEANS OF THE RESPECTIVE SCHOOLS OR FACULTIES.

-- PROVISIONS FOR THE NOMINATION AND ELECTION OF THE GOVERNING BOARDS OF THE STUDENT ASSOCIATIONS OF THE VARIOUS SCHOOLS AND FACULTIES.

5. DUE TO CLASS TIME LOST TO THE UNIVERSITY'S CLOSURE, THE UNIVERSITY CALENDAR WAS REVISED. THE FIRST SEMESTER WILL NOW END ON SEPTEMBER 8, WITH EXAMINATIONS SEPTEMBER 11-23. THE SECOND SEMESTER WILL BEGIN OCTOBER 9

AND END JANUARY 26, 1979, WITH EXAMINATIONS JANUARY 29 -
FEBRUARY 10.

6. COMMENT. A LOT IS AT STAKE POLITICALLY IN THE
UNIVERSITY. THE FEP SUPPLIES POLITICAL SHOCK TROOPS FOR
THE GOVERNMENT. THEY ORGANIZE STREET DEMONSTRATIONS, DO
CAMPAIGN CHORES AND ORGANIZE SUPPORT FOR GOVERNMENT
POLICIES. IN RETURN FEP MILITANTS RECEIVE A NUMBER OF
PERQUISITES -- INFLUENCE OVER GOVERNMENT POLICY (PRIMARILY
BUT NOT EXCLUSIVELY ON UNIVERSITY MATTERS), TRAVEL ABROAD,
SOME MINOR PATRONAGE AND IN SOME CASES AN UNDER-THE-

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COUNTER STIPEND. FURTHERMORE, IN PANAMA STUDENTS ARE
QUITE CAPABLE OF TAKING POLITICS INTO THE STREETS, WHERE
UNPREDICTABLE THINGS CAN HAPPEN. TORRIJOS HAS ALWAYS
RECOGNIZED THAT STUDENT ACTIVISM COULD SET OFF A
POLITICAL EXPLOSION. SO TORRIJOS MUST BE CAREFUL NOT TO
DO UNDUE DAMAGE TO HIS OWN SUPPORTERS IN THE UNIVERSITY,
AND AT THE SAME TIME HE MUST NOT STRENGTHEN HIS OPPOSITION
THERE. HE WILL PROBABLY TRY TO HAMPER THE OPERATION OF
HIS LEFT-WING OPPONENTS, BUT NOT SO MUCH AS TO MAKE THEM
DESPERATE. JORDEN

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